DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 197 RC 018 285

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TITLE The Development of Rural America in the Age of the Knowledge-Driven Economy.
PUB DATE 20 Jun 91
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Rural Adult Education Initiatives (Kansas City, MO, June 20-21, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Futures (of Society); *Higher Education; Human Capital; Information Services; Public Policy; *Role of Education; Rural Areas; *Rural Development; Service Occupations; Social Change; *Urban to Rural Migration
IDENTIFIERS Wayne State College NE

ABSTRACT

Several trends indicate that rural America can benefit from information-based and service sector job creation. Among the more significant trends are the movement of people from urban and suburban to rural areas, the decreasing importance of location due to communication technology, the growth of jobs in the service section, the growing dissatisfaction with the nation's largest cities, and the mobility of modern business. Higher education can play a role in moving rural America toward this desired future by raising the levels of higher education in the rural work force, and assisting with the enhancement of the quality of life in the communities in the school's service region. Higher education must also provide leadership for the development of a workable public policy initiative. As a regional state college, Wayne State College in Wayne, Nebraska is dedicated to student development and regional development. Four premises guide the college's work in student development: (1) students are human capital; (2) the college must reach, educate and graduate more of the potential students in its rural service region and the key to this is by remaining affordable and accessible; (3) the college emphasis is on teaching and support services in a personalized setting increases its students' likelihood for success; and (4) by addressing the traditional purpose of higher education--human resource development--the college will be able to make a major impact on the essence of rural revitalization. In terms of regional development, Wayne State College is a center for education, the arts, cultural activity, and community and economic development. The college aggressively delivers its public service program to the communities in the service region, and carries out a regional agenda for the benefit of statewide development. (KS)

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AMERICA

## IN THE AGE OF THE KNOWLEDGE-DRIVEN ECONOMY

Several trends can be recognized which indicate that rural America can benefit from information-based and service sector job creation. The states and communities who are aware of the trends, can position themselves to take advantage of the coming opportunities.

Among the more significant of the trends are the movement of people from urban and suburban to rural, the decreasing importance of location due to communication technology, the growing number of jobs being created in the service sector, the growing dissatisfaction with our largest cities, and the mobility of modern business.

In order to capitalize on the opportunities presented, leaders must recognize and understand the trends, create a long-term vision of a desired future, raise the levels of higher education in the rural work force, and continue to enhance the quality of life in their communities.

Leadership and the development of a workable public policy initiative will be required to initiate and drive the process. The successful implementation of such a process will require collaboration among state government, education, business, and local communities.

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I would like to provide just a word or two about the trends that I identified a moment ago. On the matter of the movement of people from urban and suburban to small towns and rural areas, John Naisbitt reports in Megatrends 2000 that "in the United States, for the first time in 200 years more people are moving to rural areas than urban. In the northeast, west, great plains, and southwest, everywhere, people are moving from city and suburbs to rural areas. They are abandoning cities for quality of life reasons: low crime rates, comparativly low housing costs, recreational opportunities and, perhaps most of all, a return to community values." At the same time, Naisbitt talks about the new electronic heartland and in describing it he says: "Linked by telephones, fax machines, federal express, and computers, a new breed of information worker is reorganizing the landscape of America. Free to live almost anywhere, more and more individuals are deciding to live in small cities and towns and rural areas. A new electronic heartland is spreading throughout developed countries around the globe, especially in the United States. Quality of life rural areas are as technologically linked to urban centers as are other cities. This megatrend of the next milineum is laying the ground work for the decline of cities."

There seems to be no disagreement about the fact that most of the jobs of the future will be created in the service sector. In fact, some think that by the year 2000, 80 percent of the jobs in this country will be in the service sector. These jobs will require higher levels of education. Many of the companies doing service sector work will have a degree of mobility that will enable them to pick up and move quite rapidly, either to relocate existing

business or to expand additional business, and many of these same companies will be able to do their work anywhere because of communications technology now available. Attract these companies and the jobs and people will follow.

But this won't happen overnight. We must develop a vision of the future that stretches out longer than ten to fifteen years. The location of major business today should not suggest that it will always be in the same location. The mobile service sector businesses don't have the heavy capital investment that was present in the industrial age. Who would have thought that the steel industry could pick up and leave Pittsburgh in a matter of ten to fifteen years. The textile industry picked up and left New England for the southeastern part of the United States in less time than it took the steel industry to move. In the scheme of things, ten to fifteen years is not a long time.

So when we begin to talk about rural America attracting major companies and significant job development in the age of the knowledge-driven economy, we need to think about five, ten, fifteen years and begin to prepare to be attractive and receptive to such oppotunities.

Peter Drucker has said that knowledge is now the central capital, the cost center, and the crucial resource of our economy. I have said that in the age of the knowledge-driven economy, higher education is one of the raw materials, human capital is the product. It's human capital that will build the knowledge-driven

economy in the same way that steel was such an important product in fueling the industrial economy.

What of the role of public higher education in helping to move rural America toward this desired future? We must work to raise the levels of higher education in the rural work force, and we must assist with the enhancement of the quality of life in the communities in our service region. At the same time that we are doing that, we must provide leadership for the development of a workable public policy initiative to drive this process, and the process must include state government, schools, business, and our local communities.

The way a regional public college sees itself is critically important in determining how it defines its role and mission. We are public agencies and in many of our rural service regions, the most visible extension of state government. We must begin to communicate to our governors and our legislators the importance of our work and we must do it in understandable terms. When we speak of our role and mission, we must clearly illustrate the social and economic utility of our work. Education for education's sake is not enough in todays highly competitive public arena. Taxpayers, as well as public officials, must see a return on investment and they must see that our work relates directly to enhancing the public agenda. If they see the connection we will be better supported.

At Wayne State College we have attempted to simplify the description of what we do as a regional state college. We say we're about two things -- student development and regional development. We then list the premises which guide our work and in so doing, speak in terms which communicate social and economic utility. For example, the following premises guide our work in student development:

1) Students are human capital, our most precious resource for the future.

2) We must reach, educate and graduate more of the potential students in our rural service region. Remaining affordable and accessible is the key.

3) Our emphasis on teaching and support services in a personalized setting increases our students' likelihood for success.

4) By addressing the traditional purpose of higher education -- human resource development -- we will be able to make a major impact on the essence of rural revitalization.

And on the matter of regional development, we state our premises as follows:

1) Our challenge is to increase the availability of a well-educated labor pool, while helping our rural communities enhance their quality of life.

2) We are a center, a focal point, a catalyst in Northeast Nebraska, not only for education, but for the arts, cultural activity, and community and economic development.

3) Rural revitalization can be enhanced significantly by aggressively delivering the college's public service programs to the communities in our service region.

4) We are a public agency carrying out a regional agenda for the benefit of statewide development.

Public colleges serving rural regions are critical to the future development of their regions. We have a leadership role to play in calling attention to the changes occurring and the possibilities that lie ahead. Our state and local governments need to hear what we are doing and why, and what it can mean to our rural communities.

Higher education is now more important than ever before. The dynamics of the global economy clearly indicate that a state or a country's prime asset will

be its human capital. We produce it and we can play a major role in developing the settings where it can be applied.

I highly recommend a review of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' policy statement on The Revitalization of Rural America. It is well done and prescribes and describes a role for our public colleges and universities which can position us in leadership roles in our states.